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ABSTRACT

The study examined the process of change and dissemination within elementary social studies programs. The methodology included becoming acquainted with programs and special projects which are available for school adoption; becoming knowledgeable about elementary social studies programs in the process of development; observing elementary social studies programs in 15 school systems; and interviewing research, development, and university personnel. Questions used in public school interviews centered on information about the city and school system, content and methods of elementary social studies, curriculum development and change, and inservice programs for teachers. In analyzing data, consideration was given to the variance in organization of social studies curricula among schools. Findings indicated that a gap exists between material that is available and material that is being used in social studies programs. It was concluded that more attention should be given to designing comprehensive social studies curriculum which provides continuity of learning. Universities can contribute to an improved social studies curriculum through dissemination of information on what is available, assisting in curriculum construction, and preparing teachers and principals for curriculum change. (Author/DB)

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ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS AND THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS: A STUDY CONDUCTED DURING SABBATICAL LEAVE FALL SEMESTER, 1976

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In response to national and societal demands changes in elementary and secondary curriculum content and method have continued to occur at an ever increasing rate. In addition, the process of curriculum change itself has been the target of study. To examine these curriculum practices firsthand, to follow up on the innovations of the 1960's and to accumulate information in person about the curriculum change process were the goals in requesting a sabbatical leave during the fall semester of 1976.

Purposes

Because of the writer's interest in social studies the purposes of the study conducted during the leave were, then, to examine the status of elementary social studies programs and to study the process of change and dissemination as seen in those programs. With regard to the former, the study included becoming acquainted with programs and special projects that have been developed and are available for school adoption, becoming knowledgeable about elementary social studies programs in the process of development and observing actual practices in elementary social studies in several school systems across the country. The second purpose involved personal interviews with research and development personnel, school curriculum leaders and university social studies and curriculum instructors.

General Plan of the Study

In order to accomplish the purposes of the study it was necessary to identify universities, agencies and schools engaged in innovative practices in elementary social studies and also to identify schools whose elementary social studies programs were representative of actual

practice. The National Council for Social Studies was contacted for information; the reply from this organization identified members of two sub-committees who might provide the needed information. A form letter of explanation, accompanied by a brief questionnaire, was sent to 48 NCSS committee members. Another form letter and brief questionnaire were sent to the elementary curriculum person or social studies consultant in the Department of Public Instruction in each of the continental states. The latter personnel were asked to identify school systems with innovative practices, schools with representative social studies programs and individual teachers who might be observed. Don Morris, Director of School Services for the U.S. Committee for UNICEF, provided some helpful information regarding individuals and schools engaged in exemplary global education programs. A teacher associate at the Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., in addition to indicating how a visit to that agency would be helpful, sent a list of persons and schools in the Boulder area that would be of interest. Having known of the projects at the Education Development Center, Research for Better Schools, the Social Studies Development Center at Indiana University and the Anthropology and Geography Curriculum Projects at the University of Georgia, letters were written asking for an opportunity to visit and confer. Additional information regarding possible sites to visit was obtained by searching in the ERIC materials in the university library.

Arranged visits were made to school districts, universities and research and development centers. Sites for visitation were identified as indicated in the previous paragraph. Since all travel was done by personal car, selection was somewhat dependent on arranging a feasible

itinerary. A categorized list of the semester's visits appears in the Appendix.

The questions used during the interviews varied according to the person's role and the function of the institution being visited. When visiting with the curriculum director, the social studies coordinator or supervisor of a public school system the questions centered on: 1) general information about the city and/or school system; 2)content and methods of elementary social studies, concentrating on scope, sequence, organizational structure, special themes and media; 3) the process of curriculum development and change; 4) in-service programs for teachers. Interviews with university and agency personnel focused on the individual's role, the function of the agency or institution, the person's assessment of the present status of elementary social studies and the person's experience in the process of curriculum change and dissemination.

Analysis of Data

The information obtained from public school social studies curriculum personnel regarding elementary social studies programs, the curriculum development process and in-service training has been compiled and analyzed. Because the visitation sites may not represent the total population of school districts due to selection procedures and because the sample of school districts is small this writer recognizes the severe limits on generalizing from these findings. Therefore, the statements made are considered to be very tentative and subject to review. Summarized also are the meetings with university personnel and with the staff members of research and development centers and special

projects.

School District Data

Interviews with the social studies specialist/ supervisor or the elementary director were conducted in 15 school systems ranging in size from 1 to 120 elementary schools.

Social Studies Program Of the 15 school districts, 8 were using some version of the expanding environment organization for the social studies curriculum; 5 of the others were using programs or had developed a local curriculum which presents to primary children concepts and generalizations from a wider environment and about other cultures. The foundation of social studies in interdisciplinary content was evident in 4/5 of the districts; in the others less attention was given to this characteristic.

There was much variance in the organization of the social studies curricula. Of the 15 programs 7 demonstrated clearly stated social studies goals, objectives drawn from the goals, scope and sequence of knowledge, skills and values, activities to implement objectives and resources. The others lacked one or more of these components. All but 3 of the programs placed almost as much emphasis on the social studies processes as on content acquisition. Some individual schools visited were placing most emphasis on processing of information skills. Of the 15 districts the elementary social studies program in 4 of the districts might be labeled as a locally developed curriculum; support of outside resources was used but the latter did not provide program direction.

Only 4 of the 15 districts used a single series for a block of grades (1-4, K-5, K-6). In 3 districts individual schools chose texts from a list of recommendations; in 4 districts there were different texts

used at different levels; in the other 4 districts the social studies program used a multi-media base.

Most of the persons interviewed indicated the individual school autonomy seen in adaptation of district program to fit local needs, in selection and purchase of materials and in the principal's responsibility for instructional leadership. In only one school district did this observer note that the autonomous decision-making had reached a state of chaos as regards the social studies program. At least 2/3 of the curriculum leaders interviewed indicated support for a centralized social studies curriculum.

Integration of social studies instruction and content with other curricular areas occurred infrequently and in isolated classrooms. Most persons interviewed agreed that fusion of studies would be valuable, but only two persons in a leadership position could identify specific steps being taken to accomplish that end.

Coordination of K-12 social studies curriculum and articulation between elementary and secondary social studies teachers were almost nonexistent. Five of the specialists/supervisors indicated some efforts were being made to improve this factor. However, even some of the latter persons posed the same problems related by the other respondents: elementary and secondary teachers speak a different language; this is a sensitive issue; there are risks involved.

Programs to train teachers in human relations and to assist pupils in affective development had been used in 4 of the 15 districts. With the possible exception of two districts, either the person interviewed or the curriculum guide indicated some attention to value development

within the social studies program.

Some attention to law studies in elementary school was being given in 8 of the 15 districts; this varied from use of units already in the adopted text, to relevant in-service meetings, to locally developed units and modules.

Most of the school districts appeared to rely on the adopted text(s) to provide students with a view of a multi-cultural society and the concept of being a world citizen. One, possibly two, of the districts visited presented students a social studies curriculum solidly based in global education.

One-third of the districts visited had separate individuals responsible for development and implementation of career education; only one of these districts was fusing career education with the total program. As for the remainder of the districts, attention to career education ranged from nothing to special World of Work units.

The supply of materials to supplement social studies programs varied from school to school and district to district. Reasons for differences in support resources were due in some cases to different size general budgets, in other cases to the specific social studies budget and in other cases to the information principals and teachers possessed about available materials and about their value for the program. In a limited number of instances were teachers observed using well-designed teacher made material.

One-third of the district curriculum leaders felt that federal and state grants had made a positive contribution to the improvement of social studies programs. Of the others, most had made no application

for a variety of reasons; two intimated the district's desire to maintain local control.

In all of the districts visited priority attention was being given to teaching of communication and mathematics skills. Attention to social studies in individual buildings depended primarily on the interest and conscientiousness of the principal; in a rare case it was a concerned teacher. In few, if any, cases did the social studies specialist have the power to change the situation. In many cases the specialist's personality and contacts seemed to make a difference.

Curriculum Development Process The process of curriculum development and/or adoption of a social studies text series varied considerably among districts. Only 1/3 of the districts used a curriculum review process which approached a systematic curriculum development model, moving from a statement of philosophy and analysis of needs through to the evaluation phase. In three districts the texts were being used because of the district purchase (wholly or in part) prior to an orderly curriculum development process and the decision for adoption was made for financial reasons. In all of the districts teachers had been involved in all or some of the phases of the social studies program development. While in 12 of the 15 districts visited there was a social studies specialist/supervisor/coordinator, the power that the individual possessed to affect change varied considerably. In some cases it was due to the role and function within the organization; in other cases it was due to the individual's operating style.

In-Service Training Each person interviewed was asked to comment on in-service training for the improvement of social studies instruction.

Answers ranged from no instruction to a series of lessons to learn new techniques. In no case did the in-service program provide for maintenance of a teaching skill beyond initial instruction. About half of the social studies specialists indicated that they were using "master teachers" to assist in the in-service of other teachers; most felt positively about this program. In most of the districts the number of in-service days was regulated by contract; in three cases no in-service days were provided. In about 1/3 of the districts most of the in-service occurred at the building level. Only four districts indicated that there was some limited financial assistance to support teacher attendance at conferences and national workshops. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that there were in-service opportunities provided by the central or area office to assist teachers in improving some aspect of social studies instruction. Most of the latter districts used this means to introduce teachers to new themes, methods and materials, as law education. Some districts required training prior to use of new programs; this was true not only of national projects as MACOS, but also of locally developed units.

Research and Development Projects

Eight research and development centers or special project sites were visited. The projects' stages ranged from development and field testing to dissemination. In all but one case the projects had undergone a number of revisions during development and as a result of field testing. Three of the special projects were created to meet particular local needs; each was supported by a special grant. At the research and development centers the themes of the social studies projects were selected because they related to previous projects, or because they coordinated with the center's main purposes or because of the director's commitment within social studies education. This visitor is generally

impressed with the organization of the curriculum (whether single unit or comprehensive program), the quality of the instructional techniques as seen in the materials and hands-on activities for pupils and the content resources observed in project materials.

Social Studies Curriculum Personnel

The tone of the conferences with persons who might be characterized as experts in social studies and curriculum development ranged from pessimistic to fairly positive. Several were discouraged by the emphasis on basic skills, the accountability movement which has tended to focus social studies measurement on terminology and map and globe skills, the continuance of traditional teaching strategies, the pressure within the profession to focus on special topics and the lack of special supportive grants. Others were optimistic based on experiences with teachers who have adopted new strategies and/or on commitments to improve particular aspects of social studies instruction, as citizenship or ethnic heritage.

In general, this writer believes that social studies curriculum leaders in the public schools and university personnel working with social studies concur that the social studies subject area is experiencing difficulty in taking its critical and full role in the total school program.

It is with regard to the process of curriculum development that this instructor has noted a gap between what the research and development and university-connected personnel on the one hand recommend and what actually occurs in the public school setting. Most of the former persons support an orderly problem solving approach to curriculum

analysis and change. Some indicated support for the team concept, bringing in a team of experts to work with a team of teachers, administrators, students and community persons. But, as noted earlier, only one-third of the districts visited used a model resembling systematic curriculum development and none of the district personnel indicated having used outside resource persons. Two of the social studies supervisors had sent some teachers to conferences and workshops to become acquainted with particular programs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The experiences of the semester provided opportunites to view social studies education from different perspectives. The examination of texts and other materials at the Social Science Education Consortium provided information about what has been developed and what is available for social studies instruction; the conferences with persons at significant research and development centers and with directors of special projects pointed out additional programs in the social studies area. The interviews with public school social studies specialists and the observations in schools afforded another view of social studies education - the reality of occurrence in the public schools. As a result this writer has reached these conclusions. There remains a gap between what is available and what is being used in the schools. Some social studies specialists and curriculum persons strive conscientiously to keep themselves and teachers informed of new social studies programs and materials; in other cases this is not done. Staffs of school districts and individual schools continue in attempts to design and write, partially and wholly, social studies curriculum; at most, it is a part-time task.

Ignored intentionally or accidentally are the great number and variety of already developed programs and materials. The problem would seem to be two-fold. The dissemination of new ideas, programs and materials in social studies is faulty. Classroom teachers and principals need to be key links in the communication network. On the other hand, individual school and classroom autonomy interfere with examination and adoption of new ideas. School district personnel and individual staffs should, following an orderly curriculum review process, examine and analyze all of what is available to meet local needs - prior to making a decision to adopt a text series or write a local program.

Because less than half of the curriculum plans examined this semester had a well-defined scope and sequence this observer believes more attention should be given to designing a social studies curriculum with comprehensiveness, but primarily to building a program that provides for continuity and cumulativeness of learning.

Another conclusion and concern is that as special themes and projects within the social studies arena are conceived and developed and as even, in some cases, a separate division or project director is assigned, the social studies program becomes very fragmented. In at least one district this visitor met teachers who were frustrated by the increasing number of requirements placed on them. It would seem a far more efficient and life-like approach to fuse new studies as law, career awareness, ethnic heritage, and other special themes into a holistic social studies curriculum. This may entail a complete overhaul of the curriculum, but the result might achieve the needed integration for students.

Elementary social studies curricula, as examined this semester, are

very diverse in selection and organization of content, inclusion and use of special themes, resources and methods of instruction. Characteristics of the "new social studies," as interdisciplinary content and values development, were more in evidence than the inquiry method of learning and teaching. With regard to the latter, several teachers were observed using this strategy very capably. But in most cases it had been pointed out that these were the outstanding teachers. A number of the persons interviewed emphasized the difficulty in getting teachers to use inquiry and small group discussion effectively. There would appear to be much more material available for social studies than is known to the practitioners. In addition, the quality and quantity of the social studies program have been eroded by the stress on communication and computation skills.

The process of curriculum development as examined during discussions about change in social studies curriculum is carried out in a variety of ways. All districts had used committees of teachers but the constitution and function of the committees varied considerably. The social studies curriculum personnel who had sponsored orderly and thorough review and study processes tended to be assertive leaders, to have knowledge of new programs and curriculum in general and to share that knowledge responsibly with teachers and principals.

The semester's experiences and accumulated information have lead this writer to the conviction that the university can contribute to an improved social studies curriculum in elementary school by taking these steps: 1) provide teachers and principals knowledge about the number and variety of programs available and in the process of development; 2) assist

teachers and principals in the construction of curriculum with scope, sequence and integration; 3) prepare teachers and principals for curriculum change by supplying information about successful models and practices and by having them participate in simulations of the same.

Appendix

Semester Visits Categorized

Following is a categorical picture of the on-site visitations. Some names appear in more than one place because of the category designations.

SCHOOLS/SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Cherry Creek Campus Middle Unit
Cherry Creek Schools
Denver, Colorado

Maple Grove Elementary School
Jefferson County Schools
Colorado

Aurora (Colorado) Public Schools

Salina (Kansas) Public Schools

Topeka (Kansas) Public Schools

Shawnee Mission (Kansas) Public Schools

Lincoln (Nebraska) Public Schools

Omaha (Nebraska) Public Schools

Markham (Illinois) Public Schools

Porter (Indiana) Elementary School
Dunes School Corporation

Arenac Eastern (Michigan) Elementary School

Waterford (Michigan) Public Schools

East Lansing (Michigan) Public Schools

Fairfax County (Virginia) Public Schools

Atlanta (Georgia) Public Schools

Carroll County(Maryland)
Public Schools

Chelmsford (Massachusetts)
Public Schools

UNIVERSITIES

University of Colorado

University of Denver

Indiana University

University of Georgia

Michigan State University

RESEARCH AND/OR DEVELOPMENT

Social Studies Development
Center at Indiana University

Geography and Anthropology
Curriculum Projects at
University of Georgia

Primary Environmental Education
Project at University of Georgia

Research for Better Schools
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Education Development Center
Newton, Massachusetts

Pontiac Social Action Project
Pontiac, Michigan

Northern Colorado Education Board
of Cooperative Services
Longmont, Colorado

DISSEMINATION AGENCIES

Social Studies Development
Center at Indiana University

Social Science Education
Consortium, Inc., Boulder, Colorado

Education Development Center
Newton, Massachusetts

Research for Better Schools
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Northern Colorado Education Board
of Cooperative Services
Longmont, Colorado

Mountain View Center for Environmental Education
Boulder, Colorado

Pontiac Social Action Project
Pontiac, Michigan

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